Report from La Voz de los de Abajo, CODEPINK and Marin Task Force on the Americas Human Rights Observation Delegation during Honduran Elections 2017

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Matt Ginsberg-Jaeckle with Soldiers - Tegucigalpa.
Photo by Chris Jeske
I. Summary

On November 26, 2017, Hondurans went to the polls, united against the consolidation of a dictatorship by Juan Orlando Hernandez (JOH) who ran for re-election illegally in violation of the Honduran constitution. Challenging JOH at the ballot box was a unique coalition, the Alianza de Oposición (Opposition Alliance) also known as the Alliance against the Dictatorship, organized by three parties ranging from left/center left (LIBRE) to center (PINU) and center right (Anti-Corruption Party - PAC). Right before the elections, the Honduran government maneuvered the PAC to support Hernandez, but its leader, Salvador Nasralla continued as candidate for president for the Alliance and most PAC membership stayed with Nasralla. The country preparing for elections remained a country still suffering the consequences of the 2009 coup: political, social, and economic consequences that include human rights violations, violence and corruption.

La Voz de los de Abajo, CODEPINK, and Marin Task Force on the Americas, all members of the Honduras Solidarity Network in North America, responded to calls for accompaniment from Honduran organizations with a human rights observation delegation. Our mission was to accompany the Honduran people during the election period, and to meet with communities and organizations under attack as well as human rights defenders and opposition activists in order to document their experience and share the information to strengthen solidarity with the Hondurans and organize opposition to US funding and support for dictatorship. We divided into two teams. One team went to La Union and to Gracias, Lempira and one team was in Tegucigalpa for the election and traveled to other parts of the country. We had people in Honduras from November 20 to December 9 with the entire delegation present from November 25 - December 3. This summary includes links to reports (most authored by La Voz de los de Abajo member Matt Ginsberg-Jaeckle) that were published on the La Voz Honduras Resists blog during the delegation.

On November 25 at around midnight, Irene Rodriguez, the last member of our delegation to arrive in Honduras came into the airport in San Pedro Sula only to be detained and have her passport taken away for reasons that were never clear. The delegation called Bertha Oliva of COFADEH (Committee of the Families of the Disappeared Detainees) who spent the night making calls to the cell phones of various government officials (National Human Rights Commission, Ministry of Security, Immigration Authority) with no luck. Finally, Irene was released with no explanation but her visa was limited to just a few days rather than the standard 90 days. La Voz de los de Abajo published a declaration condemning the detention and harassment in English and Spanish. http://hondurasresists.blogspot.com/2017/11/if-government-is-concerned-about-its.html

Our delegation met with the organizations representing social groups in permanent resistance (campesinos and indigenous peoples) whose hope from the elections was for some
“breathing room” and a government that one might be able to negotiate with or pressure and win demands. One of our visits was in La Esperanza with the indigenous organization COPINH. We met with the General Coordinator, Bertha Zuniga Cáceres and other COPINH leaders and went to a small COPINH community, La Jarcia. The community had been evicted from their land and all members were charged with criminal offenses related to simply living on their own land. The delegation went to the court where the trial was scheduled to be held and was able to present an oral petition and a letter supporting the community to the tribunal. When the trial was held later that day, the judges dropped all the charges against all of the community members who were charged. Having international attention and the possibility of the opposition winning the election combined with the effect of COPINH’s rock solid position were probably all factors in the judges going with the truth of the situation rather than siding with the local land owners and oligarchs. http://www.thenationreport.org/charges-dropped-against-indigenous-lenca-for-occupying-traditional-lands/

Traveling 6 hours across the country to the northern coast of Honduras, we met with the Fraternal Black Organization of Honduras (OFRANEH) the Garifuna organization leading the fight to defend and protect their ancestral lands. Not long ago the Garifuna community of Triunfo de la Cruz in Atlantida won a case before the Inter-American Human Rights Court (after 20 years) but the Honduran government has not fulfilled any of the actions ordered by the court. They asked for international solidarity to demand that the Honduran government comply with the court’s ruling. Their organization has been the target of repression and their coordinator Miriam Miranda has been threatened with death as well as detained and attacked by security forces. There was a lively debate about how much meaning the elections would have for their communities given the deep discrimination they face and the fact that they have to fight for any space in which to be heard no matter who wins elections. At the same time they were all
adamant on the necessity and importance of stopping the consolidation of a dictatorship by Juan Orlando Hernandez, saying that the future of democracy is what is at stake.

The campesino movement is another large social movement that has been and is in permanent resistance. Delegation members met with the National Center for Rural Workers (CNTC) in two regions (Progreso and La Paz) and with the national leadership. The CNTC has been outspoken against the consolidation of power by Hernandez and the policies and laws that have been put into place to strengthen the big landowners and agricultural, mining, hydroelectric or tourism corporations’ land-grabbing. Meanwhile, the poorest campesinos are forced off the land and increasingly violently evicted, even by police and military using live ammunition, arrested and imprisoned. They told us that for the campesinos the consolidation of a dictatorship under Hernandez means death either by starvation or repression and it means mass migration of youth from the countryside to the US or other countries.

We visited a community in La Paz that has been evicted multiple times and its leaders, along with most of the La Paz regional leaders of the CNTC, threatened with death. They talked about the urgency of winning a new agrarian reform to resolve the conflicts in the countryside, and put the land to productive use to increase Honduras’ food sovereignty and alleviate hunger. We were able to interview the CNTC general secretary, Franklin Almendares, shortly before election day.

The student movement, which includes high school and university students, has confronted all the coup regimes over privatization and defunding of public education. Over the past two years, the students at the National Autonomous University of Honduras (UNAH) have organized strikes, occupations and protests against the Hernandez regime. We met with members of the University Student Movement (MEU) who explained that Hernandez’s “reforms” of higher education are closing off access to university education for students from poorer and even middle class backgrounds and want to model higher education on the business oriented U.S. model both in curriculum and the way professors and students are treated. The right to free speech and protest have been cut off as the students have been expelled, arrested, beaten, tear gassed and assassinated by government security forces and the private security company paid by government funds at the public university. Many students have gone into hiding or can’t go to their homes because of the repression. See section III.B for a short report on the meeting with MEU by Daniel Lichtenstein-Boris
On November 26, election day, the Tegucigalpa team met with one of the many, neighborhood LIBRE collectives in a poor neighborhood whose members recounted the years of organizing resistance in the community and their optimism that it would be possible, though not easy, to win the election. The members of the collective have been fired from jobs and threatened because of their opposition to the coup and to Hernandez’ election and re-election. We observed the situation at the polls in three schools in their neighborhood: observing the militarization of the polls, the intimidations and vote-buying being carried on by the ruling party (National Party) people, and listening to the stories of intimidation and reprisals against Alianza supporters. At one polling center our observation team was threatened and intimidated because they observed the “pay for your vote” operation by the National Party. When a policewoman and election official trying to uphold democracy intervened, the National Party gang also threatened them. Despite the big presence of the security forces and National Party gangs, all three voting centers voted overwhelmingly in favor of the Alianza. It was there that we began to understand just how strong public opposition to Juan Orlando Hernandez was going to be. http://hondurasresists.blogspot.com/2017/11/amidst-militarization-and-manipulation.html

Our team in La Union, Lempira accompanied an at-risk LIBRE member and Alianza candidate and observed the elections in a small city where the Juan Orlando Hernandez’s National Party is strong. There is also a strong Alianza presence and occurrences of intimidation and threats against Alianza activists. The team also visited a political prisoner in Hernandez’s home town of Gracias, Lempira, who has been held since after the 2013 election, falsely accused of election fraud. See the team’s observations in section III.C

After the election, as the election fraud became evident, the Honduran people responded with protests while Hernandez responded with brutal repression. On November 29 and 30 our delegation was witness to the massive use of tear gas, beatings and armed intimidation against non-violent protesters in Tegucigalpa. We collaborated with Honduran human rights defenders to get detainees released and to stop beatings of protesters. http://hondurasresists.blogspot.com/2017/11/anti-fraud-protesters-and-observers.html http://hondurasresists.blogspot.com/2017/12/military-repeatedly-threatens-to.html http://hondurasresists.blogspot.com/2017/12/military-chases-group-beats-man.htm

On November 30, as militarization and repression increased and a state of emergency with a 6pm to 6am curfew was declared, the US issued its certification (part of an ongoing review) that Honduras is making progress in human rights. On the same day the first documented death of someone killed by the military and police during the protests occurred in the city of La Ceiba. The Honduran people responded with after-curfew neighborhood protests, banging pots and pans, setting of firecrackers and in some areas blocking local streets. The Military Police then began using live ammunition, picking off protesters under cover of darkness. Members of the delegation who stayed on for several days accompanied Honduran human rights defenders at the morgue, hospital and police stations as they searched for victims and survivors of the repression. http://hondurasresists.blogspot.com/2017/12/ground-zero-wounded-protesters-and.html

Update after the delegation: On December 17, the President of the Organization of American States, Luis Almagro published a call for new elections because the November 26th elections process and subsequent counting process were too tainted to determine results. Protest marches and road blocks by protesters continued, but on December 23, 2017, the US congratulated Hernandez on his election victory. The Honduran human rights organization Committee of the Families of the Disappeared Detainees in Honduras (COFADEH) reported as of December 30, 2017 there were 30 deaths, 234 injured (147 seriously) and at least 1,396 arrests. There are numerous political prisoners — at least 22 are being held as of this writing. The Honduran people through their organizations both small and large, and the Alianza have responded with a declaration of a non-violent insurrection to continue until the dictatorship is brought down. Protests continue and Hernandez had to hold his inauguration ceremony under the highest levels of militarization ever seen in the country. Protests in Tegucigalpa were attacked by police and military and more deaths and detentions have occurred. We include in this report the links to COFADEH’s most recent updated report in English. http://defensoresenlinea.com/2nd-cofadeh-report-english/

Conclusions
The most powerful international entities — European Union, Organization of the American States (OAS), and United Nations, while documenting the multiple irregularities and violent excesses of the Hernandez regime have, so far turned a blind eye to the reality of...
the situation and have refused to take a strong stand on the illegitimacy of the imposed Hernandez government. The role of the U.S. in Honduras is especially shameful. It is the “power behind the throne” with its continuing financial, military and political support for dictatorship and behind the scenes pressure and manipulation to force recognition of Hernandez’s “election victory”. What has happened in Honduras since November 26, 2017, is another coup and the individuals and organizations participating in the November 2017 human rights observation delegation call on solidarity and human rights organizations in the U.S. to work for the freedom of the political prisoners, to cut off U.S. funding for the repression and to end all U.S. support for dictatorship.

Victoria Cervantes for La Voz de los de Abajo

II. Delegation Members:

- Diana Bohn, San Francisco Bay Area, California: Nicaragua Community Center for Action and Marin Task Force on the Americas
- Julie Callahan, San Francisco Bay Area, California: CODEPINK
- Victoria Cervantes, Chicago, Illinois: La Voz de los de Abajo
- Matt Ginsberg-Jaekle, Chicago, Illinois: La Voz de los de Abajo
- Christopher Jeske, Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Marquette University Center for Peacemaking
- Daniel Lichtenstein-Boris, Los Angeles, California: Labor activist
- Ana Orozco, New York City: Grassroots Global Justice Alliance
- Maria Robinson, San Francisco Bay Area: Marin Task Force on the Americas and CODEPINK
III. Observations and Experiences from Delegation Members

A. Victoria Cervantes: Before the Election: Propaganda Campaign and the Resistance Prepares. Arriving a week before the November 26th election, I found that things were already even more tense than usual; the government was showing its teeth and the importance of the election for the extreme right wing of the Americas was clear. On November 16, the Venezuelan social justice musical group, Los Guaraguao, invited to perform at the concert closing the campaign of the Alianza de Oposición, was denied entrance to the country. The group’s members were detained at the airport for 16 hours and then deported. Interestingly, on the same day, (November 16) Honduras’ pro-government media had headlines quoting former US State Department official Otto Reich claiming that there were 145 Venezuelans trying to infiltrate Honduras to destabilize it during the elections. Reich is well known for his involvement in the Iran Contra scheme and various coups in Latin America including the failed 2002 coup against Hugo Chavez in Venezuela and the 2009 coup in Honduras. Soon after the Reich declaration, there were headlines about weapons and do-it-yourself “terrorist manuals” having been found, conveniently packaged up with LIBRE Party banners that were discovered after an anonymous tip conveniently sent the police to search a house in a neighborhood with a
strong gang presence in Tegucigalpa. All of this was developing a narrative to set the stage to justify any type of repression or restriction of rights against the parties, organizations and individuals opposed to Hernandez because they are probably all “foreign agents” “socialists” or “gang members”.

On November 21, I visited a campesino community near Progreso that is part of the National Center of Rural Workers (CNTC) and found them working on a community radio station that they hope to operate as a tool for organizing and education. They were sure that most people would vote for the opposition but skeptical that the victory would be allowed to happen. I also met with an opposition candidate for the Alianza who was emphatic on the necessity of stopping Hernandez from consolidating a dictatorship and who predicted a wide margin of victory for the opposition as well as a negative reaction from Hernandez. By pure chance I ran into the leader of the Garifuna organization OFRANEH, Miriam Miranda, who was sure that Hernandez would attempt blatant fraud and emphasized the importance of watching over the process with great care.

By the time voting began on November 26 there had been two assassinations of opposition activists just during the week I arrived. Immigration detentions and even deportations of journalists, invited election observers and human rights observers (including the temporary detention of Irene Rodriguez a member of our delegation) continued before and after election day as did the militarization of the country.
B. Daniel Lichtenstein-Boris: The Students: We boarded the van again, and returned to the hotel, and entered a conference room. I was told not to video or audio record the conversation. Five youth, all no more than 25 years old, sat on one side of the table, four young men and one woman.

On the left the first began to speak. He was the oldest, and the others looked up to him. His black grizzled facial hair had been neatly trimmed, and he wore a loosely fitting collared flannel shirt, one button undone. He began to speak eloquently in Spanish, offering his testimony. He had been one of a dozen students expelled from Tegucigalpa’s main public university. He was in hiding, off the grid, underground, staying at a different place every night. After the University identified him as a leader of the student movement, and targeted him with expulsion, masked gunmen threatened to kidnap and assassinate him. They called it “to disappear” someone. The police, paramilitaries, and drug cartels worked side by side. The University students had just concluded a six-month strike that shut down the campus. They had many grievances; the student movement was at the forefront of the nation’s fight against dictatorship and repression. The University was being privatized, the curriculum dumbed down, the cost of tuition, fees, books, labs, and other incidental charges made it incredibly difficult for anyone to access higher education.

After student protesters occupied the administration building to protest rising student fees, the supposedly “autonomous” University, a sacred space of learning, inquiry, and debate where soldiers could not enter, they called in the military and police. The uniformed officers beat and jailed students and youth. University administrators leveled criminal charges against the movement’s supposed leaders, and expelled them from A small group, the supposed ring leaders, were expelled. There were threats on their lives and they remained in hiding. One fellow pupil was disappeared, his body never found. His mother held a press conference outside the rector’s office to demand they give her back her son’s body. The next day, the grieving mother was charged with libel for leveling false accusations against the University’s president.

The second student began speaking, a skinny lanky kid, he wore a t-shirt with broad white and blue horizontal stripes, and blue jeans. His arms were thin and dangled off his shoulders. His face looked smooth, like he hadn’t yet started shaving. The University represents knowledge. Families sacrifice so much so their children can attend. And they have been raising prices and dumbing down the quality of education. They don’t want youth to learn. Repression has been fierce. They have beaten and arrested us. But we don’t care. We care, but we don’t. We will continue to protest, so that those who died did not die in vain, so that other parents don’t have to work so hard their entire lives to save to send their children to school.
They were just kids. They were afraid but determined. Was that Courage? One was talking about the repression, the violence, his friends who had been jailed, disappeared. He started crying. One boy couldn’t have been over 21. His comrade the one with the baby face and blue striped shirt got up and started rubbing his shoulders. He was trembling. The older student, the one who had been expelled, continued where his fellow activist left off. Repression against the student movement was fierce. Students have always been at the vanguard of resistance. The resistance to the coup, to the dictatorship. The students are radicalized. They learn, and educate themselves, and it liberates them. They bring it back to the people, in the city colonias, the slums on the hillsides, the countryside and villages. They bring this liberatory education and it opens the people’s eyes. That is why they are privatizing education, and dumbing down the curriculum, and making education harder to access. It costs more, it is more career and technical vocational training then well-rounded thought. The University teaches us to think and through thinking we can open our eyes to the injustices of this country and the world and realize that it doesn’t have to be like this and another world is possible, and we have the means to make it a reality. The University opens our eyes and allows us to open the eyes of others. That is why we continue to fight for public education, at the risk of being tear gassed, being shot with rubber bullets, hit by batons and being disappeared, kidnapped, assassinated, our bodies never to be found. This is why we continue.

The boy who started crying had regained his composure. The kid with the blue stripes had returned to his seat. The young woman on his right had her hand on his back. We continue to protest, to speak out, and to fight against the privatization of the University to continue to the struggle that our friends have martyred themselves for. We have to. We remember them. He began listing their names. Those names. They kept repeating them, who was it who was jailed, who was disappeared, beaten and shot. One name escaped their memory, they stopped, and another said his name. The names to remember them, their lives snuffed out too young. They had courage. They were afraid, terrified really, but they kept going.

I asked them what the privatization of the University meant. The woman told me they were increasing fees. They increased the cost of labs, of books, of supplies, there were all these additional fees and costs that made it almost impossible for a Honduran family to afford to send their children to the University, even if they passed the admissions test. The other way was that they were changing the curriculum, dumbing it down, tailoring it more to careers and less liberal arts education. They were gutting the humanities. It sounded too familiar. In fact, a lot of what they were fighting against, the things they risked their lives, the reasons they shut down the University for six months and faced off riot police, soldiers, and evaded death squads intent to kidnap and disappear them; this had already happened in the United States.
The University of California used to be free for all residents. Then in-state fees had increased, there were computer lab fees, our public health textbooks cost way over 100 dollars. Then there were budget cuts in the English Department, and in History, and Philosophy.

The group of students left. Vicki called them cabs. The three boys and the girl were headed back to the neighborhood around the University. The older youth would go separately. Just to downtown he said. He was in hiding. The military wanted to kill him. They smoked cigarettes nervously in the corner of the hotel’s courtyard. The cabs came, and they left.

C. Election Day In Hernandez’s Stronghold

Maria Robinson: Three of us – Diana Bohn, Julie Callahan and Maria Robinson- made the 6-hour journey over typically terrible “all-weather roads” to La Union, Lempira (in western Honduras) in order to provide human rights support to opposition activists in what is one of the strongholds of the ruling National Party and its leadership, notably the Reyes family. The Reyes family, close friends of Juan Orlando Hernandez, unquestionably control the municipality of La Union and much of the government. Samuel Reyes was Minister of Defense. In fact, it was his helicopter which took off the back roof of an opposition activist’s home (Rigo Matute Ponce) a year ago; and our delegation was able to observe a version of that harassment when Reyes’ helicopter again flew quite low over the same activist’s house--while we were in it!

Samuel Reyes’ brother Asterio Reyes is the President of IHCAFE (the Honduran Coffee Export association) as well as the association of Coffee Cooperatives in Honduras. (The only earthmoving equipment we saw were three huge machines repairing the road less than 10 miles from where Asterio Reyes has his own coffee plantations!) The third brother, Evelio Reyes, is the head of the powerful Evangelical church, Vida Abundante , which has a bilingual school in La Union, and congregations all over Honduras.

Because of the Marin Task Force’s ongoing relationship with a coffee cooperative that Rigo is part of, we have been aware of attempts to “rig the elections” for the last 18 months. Specifically, on June 30, 2016 , Nelson Tejada, the Municipal Director in La Union of the Honduran National Directory (which includes the maintenance of the voting registry for the municipality) was among 12 persons arrested as part of a FUSINA-led raid against criminal gangs, and the only one who wasn’t a real gang member. Now, 18 months later, Nelson is still in jail – framed by a “protected witness” – a woman who is allowed to give testimony.
anonymously and who already perjured herself by giving false testimony in one other case.

Also thru Rigo, we were aware of the escalating bids for buying votes prior to the election, mainly because the opposition had a surprising number of sympathizers within the National Party who would relay the latest attempted bribe. In the poorest areas, the standard bribe was the “Canasta Basica”, the basic necessities, such as a pound or two of rice, beans, corn and some lard – worth a few dollars at most. Other voters were offered two bags of cement- with offers escalating as the election approached. The last bid we heard was $10,000 Lempiras ---- or over $400!

The other critical “Fix” before the election was the “takeover “of PAC, Nasralla’s original party, by an “insurgent” (with the help of the National Party ). Since neither LIBRE nor Nasralla were recognized by the TSE (the Electoral Commission, stacked in favor of JOH) they were deprived of the funding which the other parties received. In La Union, as a consequence, the Opposition made their own banners, posters and flags by hand… but unfortunately didn’t even have enough money on Election day to buy enough gas to round up all their voters to get to the polls.

On Election Eve, we received word from Rigo that his dad had received a threatening call from none other than Cesar Reyes, the son of Asterio Reyes, head of the Coffee Export association, IHCAFE. (All the thugs in La Union who would usually be sent to do this were still in jail ) . “Tell your son to stop what he’s doing… OR YOU KNOW WHAT COULD HAPPEN TO HIM!” While that was very upsetting to Rigo’s dad, Rigo brushed it off.

After the election we went with Rigo to Gracias, to visit the falsely imprisoned Registrar, Nelson Tejada. While there, Rigo received a call that another activist, Jose German Ramos, had been killed in broad daylight during a post-election altercation. Fortunately, the following morning we learned that the victim’s skull had only been grazed by a bullet knocking him unconscious for over an hour. On the 27th we went, as human rights observers to Gualciras to take the victim’s testimony at his home. No sooner had we entered Jose Ramos’ home than he received a call from a
mediator (a relative) who was “on his way” to Gualciras to try and reach a settlement. Shortly thereafter, two more mediators arrived from the National Party. We cleared the room (stating that victims had a right to privacy when giving testimony) while Jose gave us the story, as follows:

Late Monday afternoon (November 27) opposition supporters were walking in a show of support from the home of the opposition mayoral candidate toward the town square (a “caminata”). Several 4X4 vehicles were also carrying opposition supporters. They met up with a 4X4 driven by (armed) National Party supporter, Marco Antonio Juarez, and a “fender-bender” occurred, at which time Marco Antonio fired two shots, hitting Jose who was trying to intervene on behalf of his friend.

Marco Antonio (who works for the Registry, but whose unofficial job is to take care of the Reyes family’s horses!) fled to the home of Asterio Reyes down the block. The victim, Jose Ramos, now recovered, went to Gracias to file a formal complaint the next day. This was a tactic which gave incentive to the offender’s relatives to reach a settlement. We learned that Jose Ramos’ real goal was to have the offender, Marco Antonio Juarez, pay for the repair of both cars involved --- probably at a cost of several thousand dollars. In return, the complaint would be withdrawn, and Marco Antonio could keep his municipal job. This is how things tend to be settled when there is uneven distribution of power and no rule of law…

**Julie Callahan:** We (Maria, Diana and I) observed the elections in La Unión. We arrived at the first aldea (neighborhood polling station) in the morning on election day. At first, there was nothing of note happening, however after 30 minutes or so after our arrival we noticed many people running in the direction of one of the many classrooms that were being used for voting. This was the largest aldea in La Unión, in the center of downtown. When we arrived at the classroom in question, we found that the door to the classroom had been closed. We talked with a number of different people working inside this particular classroom and we were told that they closed the door because someone was having trouble voting and they wanted to give him his privacy.

This same room had additional problems throughout much of the voting day. Although other rooms seemed to have people flow through relatively easily, this room had a constant line that created at least a 30 – 60 minute waiting period before people could vote. Maria, Diana and I noticed that the setup of the tables, staff and voting booths created a situation where people could not enter or exit easily. We believe that this had much to do with the delays that were caused. I had spoken with two of the TSE people who were responsible for the voting integrity overall and they both said that they would look into changing the set-up to alleviate the crowding and delays, and yet did nothing. I was told that it was known that this
particular precinct – 13409 - had a large number of Alliance supporters, so it appeared that this set-up may have been deliberate in order to cause delays and discourage voters. There were other rooms that had a very different arrangement and there were no back-ups while we observed them. I found it suspicious that those in charge of making sure that all the voting was done efficiently and ethically ignored our notification about the less than ideal set up in the one room where there was clearly an issue with people having to wait through very long lines to vote.

There had been an order by the government not to carry firearms during the week of the elections, however we were told that in La Unión, some supporters of Hernández were actually carrying firearms, such as the one that was used to shoot Jose, the gentleman we met with who had been shot in the head.

Maria Robinson: The turnout was exceptionally high in town and in two districts that we visited (San Bartolo and Pinabetal) — close to 70 percent in both areas. Also worth noting is that even in this stronghold of JOH, in the tallies that I was able to write down, Nasralla had obtained 46 percent of the vote! Even with all the bribery, vote-buying and long-term planning for fraud, JOH could barely win in his own district…a good indication that Nasralla’s surprise win in the country as a whole was legitimate.

D. Daniel Lichtenstein-Boris: Tegucigalpa After the Election: It was the evening of Wednesday, November 29, 2017. Crowds of youthful protestors gathered in front of a guarded compound where the ballots cast in Sunday’s National election were stored, anticipating the announcement of results. Inside, observers from both political parties watched election officials count the votes. The mood outside was both rambunctious and festive. Teenagers lit firecrackers, running away and returning after they exploded, jumping up and down like at a concert. A truck’s stereo played salsa music, a young man asked his partner to dance; he lifted
his hand and she spun around. College and high school aged youth waived red flags of the opposition Libre and Alianza parties. A group of teenage boys clutched the corners of a giant blue and white Honduran flag, running through the crowd, stopping suddenly to lift the flag up and down, chanting and singing. One girl, about four feet tall, clutched the flag’s fabric tightly in her tiny hands, as they careened through the assembly.

Families gathered. Salvador clutched his mother Michelle’s waist; he was cold, hungry, and getting sleepy, he complained, his face pressed against her navel. Michelle, her son, and younger sister lived nearby. Under Juan Orlando Hernandez, health insurance premiums skyrocketed she explained. The doctors were on strike because they hadn’t been paid, and Tegucigalpa only had two hospitals. Her cousins lived in Sacramento and Houston. She had a good job, and wanted to stay, but, then she looked down at the boy. It was Salvador’s bedtime.

We eventually left. Tomorrow would also be another long day. Minutes after our cab departed, the military police tear-gassed the assembly. We returned to see protesters running, clutching their faces with garments, crying and screaming. The stench of tear gas overwhelmed the senses and burned the eyes. Young men called out excitingly, waving flags on wooden sticks. The military police advanced, gripping shields to form a wall and clutching metal batons.

As we approached, we announced ourselves and took pictures. We were wearing fluorescent yellow vests emblazoned with the words Derechos Humanos. I saw the wide-open eyes of Honduran police encased in plastic goggles. They seemed afraid, bewildered, and excited, just like those they tear-gassed. Suddenly they retreated. One protester approached me, yelling in English, “Do you see what they are doing to us? Human rights? This is not democracy, this is dictatorship,” he cried.
We returned to the plaza where the crowd assembled before. A military tank sprayed chemicals on a crowd to our right. One could see the red light of burning tires and thick black smoke. My colleague snapped photos within feet of the soldiers. One approached, raising his baton, his superior called for him to return to their defensive perimeter.

A semblance of calm descended. A few brave protesters faced off with the soldiers. The streets were full of burning trash piles and discarded silver tear gas canisters. A woman walked calmly through the smoke, selling gum and cigarettes out of an open suitcase strapped around her neck.

Heading to the hotel, we stopped and showed our human rights observer badges to a young protester who guarded a barricade that blocked the street. He moved cinder blocks and we drove on.

As they were tear gassed, election observers from inside the building also fled. Only the government controlled the ballots. (For more of Dan’s observations over the 8 day delegation (https://danwlb.com/2018/02/22/eight-days-in-honduras/) )
E. Chris Jeske: Nestor Aleman, Teacher, union leader, and political candidate targeted for standing up to dictatorship and defending democracy: Our delegation arrived in El Progreso, Yoro two days after the election on November 28. During our time there, we met with Nestor Aleman, a high school and university sociology teacher, former vice president of COPEMH (the teacher’s union), and candidate for congress in the recent election for the PINU party (one of the parties making up the Alliance Against the Dictatorship). Our wide-ranging conversation with Aleman made it evident why he is a respected social movement leader and trusted voice in his community.

Aleman described the social struggle in Honduras as two-fold. First, there is a struggle against the neoliberal projects that the government has imposed. For the past eight years, the government has been taking away labor and social rights from the people, which has in effect created more poverty and suffering. Second, they are facing a government that wants to stay in power. The 2013 election was tainted by fraud and there has been even more fraud in this election.

He went on to explain how he sees Honduras fitting into the broader global struggle as well. Right now, Honduras is part of a global project to expel all progressive government in the world and to put conservative neoliberal governments in place. “All they see is money,” he said, “They are putting money first over people.”

The Honduran people know that if JOH wins the election, they will be facing a dictatorship. And people are aware of how brutal life has been under dictatorships in Latin America. The takeaway of the election is that “Honduras has awakened,” Aleman said. This was not the result that JOH was expecting.

Throughout the conversation, there were two points that Aleman reiterated several times. First that this is a very tense moment in Honduras, and second, to make sure it is peaceful.

The day after our meeting, widespread violence broke out across Honduras as JOH sent the Police, Military, and Military Police into the streets to violently repress anti-fraud demonstrators. In response to the state-initiated violence and labelling of anti-fraud demonstrators as gang members, Aleman published a pointed essay titled “Gang Against Gang or Democracy against Dictatorship: Civil War in Honduras?”

Aleman understands the danger of speaking out against the government as after the coup he was jailed for some time and some of his colleagues were killed. Now he is facing new threats as he is being targeted in a smear campaign. His picture is included on a flyer circulated on social media that accuses Aleman and 8 others (including the Jesuit priest Ismael “Melo” Moreno and opposition Congressman Bartolo Fuentes) of being “The Axis of Evil” in the region.
IV. Video Links:
“Honduras in Flames”  [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=emy0sUCGox0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=emy0sUCGox0)
Video of delegation experience by Matt Ginsberg-Jaekle

V. Delegation Itinerary
Places Visited

- Tegucigalpa, Francisco Morazan
- Progreso, Atlantida
- Triunfo de la Cruz, Atlantida
- Tutule, La Paz
- La Esperanza, Intibucá
- La Union, Lempira
- Gracias, Lempira

Honduran Organizations Interviewed
- Alianza de la Oposición (Opposition Alliance)
- CNTC - Central Nacional de los Trabajadores del Campo (National Center for Rural Workers)
- COFADEH - Committee of the Families of the Disappeared Detainees in Honduras
- COPINH - Consejo Cívico del Organizaciones Populares Indígenas de Honduras (Civic Counsel of Indigenous Popular Organizations of Honduras)
- CIPRODEH - Centro de Investigación y Promoción de los Derechos Humanos (Center for the Investigation and Promotion of Human Rights)
- Convergencia en Contra el Continuismo - (Convergence Against Reelection/Continuation)
- MEU - Movimiento Estudiantil Universitario (University Student Movement)
- OFRANEH - Organización Fraternal Negra de Honduras (Black Fraternal Organization of Honduras)
- Red Nacional de Defensoras de DDHH en Honduras (Network of Women Human Rights Defenders in Honduras)

Press Conferences Attended
- Convergencia en Contra la Dictadura y Continuismo (2)
- Plataforma de DDHH (Human Rights Platform)
- Alianza de la Oposición

VI. Interviews Given by Delegation Members through January

In Honduras
- Radio Progreso (multiple)
- Radio Globo
- UNETV
- Defensores En Linea (multiple)
- Criteria
- C-Libre
- HCH TV
- El Libertador
- Radio America

US/Europe/Canada (Partial List)
- Worldview on Chicago Public Media - NPR (multiple)[https://www.wbez.org/shows/worldview/honduran-president-inaugurated/8bad7bc2-3968-4ae6-9fc2-bef8fe2a4b2c](https://www.wbez.org/shows/worldview/honduran-president-inaugurated/8bad7bc2-3968-4ae6-9fc2-bef8fe2a4b2c)
- Grass is Greener Radio Show, Milwaukee, Wisconsin
- Live from the Heartland Radio Chicago [https://www.livefromtheheartland.com/shows/2017/12/28/7lgxb524jh7moxlax574l1gcteatmx](https://www.livefromtheheartland.com/shows/2017/12/28/7lgxb524jh7moxlax574l1gcteatmx)


• KPFA La Raza Chronicles
• KPFA 94.1, Project Censored
• WRFG “Beyond Borders” www.wrfg.org
• Community Media Center TV: Maria Robinson and Diana Bohn on Community Media Center TV  https://youtu.be/251t-80sRyA

Left: Ana Orozco

Below: Christine Reyes Whipple